

THAT WHICH IS CLAIMED:

1       1.     A method for accessing a plurality of bi-directional services over a cable television  
2 network, comprising:

3                 presenting a program guide to at least one subscriber of a cable television network,  
4 wherein the program guide displays at least one of a plurality of bi-directional services offered over  
5 the cable television network;

6                 populating a bi-directional services database with information related to the bi-  
7 directional services displayed in the program guide;

8                 receiving a request from a subscriber for a bi-directional service displayed in the  
9 program guide;

10                querying the bi-directional services database to determine whether the bi-directional  
11 service requested by the subscriber is available for consumption in a manner requested by the  
12 subscriber;

13                rendering the bi-directional service requested by the subscriber; and

14                updating the bi-directional services database to reflect that the bi-directional service  
15 requested by the subscriber has been rendered.

1       2.     The method of claim 1, wherein receiving a request from a subscriber for a bi-  
2 directional service comprises a bi-directional communication session between the subscriber and a  
3 content provider.

1       3.     The method of claim 1, wherein receiving a request from a subscriber for a bi-  
2 directional service comprises a bi-directional communication session concurrently between a content  
3 provider and a plurality of subscribers.

1       4.     The method of claim 1, wherein receiving a request from a subscriber for a bi-  
2 directional service comprises a bi-directional communication session between the subscriber and at  
3 least one other subscriber.

1       5.     The method of claim 1, wherein receiving a request from a subscriber for a bi-  
2 directional service comprises a real-time bi-directional communication session between the subscriber  
3 and a content provider.

1       6.     The method of claim 1, wherein receiving a request from a subscriber for a bi-  
2 directional service comprises a request of a bi-directional communication service for future  
3 consumption.

1       7.     The method of claim 1, wherein receiving a request from a subscriber for a bi-  
2 directional service comprises one of a plurality of instantiations of a bi-directional service offered by a  
3 content provider.

1        8.     The method of claim 7, wherein querying the bi-directional services database to  
2 determine whether the bi-directional service requested by the subscriber is available comprises  
3 querying the bi-directional services database to determine whether an instantiation of the bi-  
4 directional service requested by the subscriber is available.

1        9.     The method of claim 7, wherein updating the bi-directional services database to  
2 reflect that the bi-directional service requested by the subscriber has been rendered comprises  
3 updating the bi-directional services database to reflect that an instantiation of the bi-directional service  
4 requested by the subscriber has been rendered.

1        10.    The method of claim 1, further comprising sending a denial of service message to the  
2 subscriber if the bi-directional service requested by the subscriber is not available.

1        11.    The method of claim 1, further comprising prompting the subscriber to request  
2 another bi-directional service if the bi-directional service requested by the subscriber is not available.

1        12.    The method of claim 1, further comprising prompting the subscriber to reserve the bi-  
2 directional service for another time if the bi-directional service requested by the subscriber is not  
3 available.

1        13.     A method for accessing a plurality of bi-directional services over a cable television  
2     network, comprising the steps of:

3                populating a bi-directional services database with information related to a plurality of  
4     bi-directional services;

5                sending the bi-directional services database to a home terminal of a first subscriber of  
6     a cable television network;

7                presenting a program guide to the first subscriber of the cable television network via  
8     the home terminal, wherein the program guide displays at least one of a plurality of bi-directional  
9     services;

10          receiving a request from the first subscriber for a bi-directional service displayed in  
11    the program guide;

12          querying the bi-directional services database to determine whether the bi-directional  
13    service requested by the first subscriber is available;

14          rendering the bi-directional service requested by the first subscriber;

15          generating an updated bi-directional services database to reflect that the bi-directional  
16    service requested by the first subscriber has been rendered; and

17          transmitting the updated bi-directional services database to a second subscriber.

1        14.     The method of claim 13, wherein transmitting the updated bi-directional services  
2     database to a second subscriber occurs on a scheduled basis.

1        15.     The method of claim 13, wherein populating a bi-directional services database  
2     includes populating an availability table of entries, each entry respectively associated with a bi-  
3     directional service and each entry indicating whether the associated bi-directional service is available.

1        16.     The method of claim 15, wherein querying the bi-directional services database to  
2     determine whether the bi-directional service requested by the first subscriber is available comprises  
3     querying an availability table entry in the availability table of entries that is associated with the bi-  
4     directional service requested by the first user.

1        17.     The method of claim 16, wherein generating an updated bi-directional services  
2     database to reflect that the bi-directional service requested by the first subscriber has been rendered  
3     comprises updating the availability table entry in the availability table of entries that is associated with  
4     the bi-directional service requested by the first user.

1        18.     The method of claim 17, wherein transmitting the updated bi-directional services  
2     database to a second subscriber comprises transmitting the availability table of entries to the second  
3     subscriber.

1        19.     The method of claim 17, wherein transmitting the updated bi-directional services  
2 database to a second subscriber comprises transmitting the availability table entry associated with the  
3 bi-directional service requested by the first user.

1        20.     The method of claim 13, wherein populating a bi-directional services database with  
2 information related to a plurality of bi-directional services comprises populating the bi-directional  
3 services database with at least one of a bi-directional service title, a bi-directional service content  
4 description, a bi-directional service category, the identity of the content provider that provides the bi-  
5 directional service, a description of the people that fulfill the bi-directional service and bi-directional  
6 service rating information.

1        21. A system for providing a bi-directional services programming guide over a cable  
2 television network, comprising:  
3              a bi-directional services content provider;  
4              a headend in communication with a hybrid fiber-coax network and the bi-directional  
5 services content provider;  
6              a bi-directional communications server, configured to establish bi-directional  
7 communication between the bi-directional services content provider and the headend;  
8              a home communication terminal in communication with a display device and in  
9 communication with the headend via the hybrid fiber-coax network;  
10             a bi-directional services program guide application server in communication with the  
11 bi-directional communications server, wherein the bi-directional services program guide application  
12 server is configured to establish bi-directional communication between the headend and the home  
13 communication terminal; and  
14             a bi-directional services program guide client application residing on the home  
15 communication terminal and in communication with the bi-directional services program guide  
16 application server, wherein the bi-directional services program guide client application is configured  
17 to generate the bi-directional services programming guide on the display device and to establish bi-  
18 directional communications between the bi-directional services content provider and the home  
19 communications terminal.

1        22. The system of claim 21, wherein the bi-directional communications server resides at  
2 the headend.

1        23. The system of claim 21, wherein the bi-directional services program guide application  
2 server resides at the headend.

1        24. The system of claim 21, wherein the bi-directional communications server  
2 communicates with the bi-directional services content provider through at least one of a router, a  
3 satellite receiver, a satellite transceiver, a terrestrial receiver, a terrestrial antenna and a bi-directional  
4 gateway connected to a backbone switch.

1        25. The system of claim 21, further comprising a bi-directional services database in  
2 communication with the bi-directional services program guide application server and the bi-  
3 directional services program guide client application, wherein the bi-directional services database  
4 stores information pertaining to bi-directional services for presentation via the display device.

1        26. The system of claim 25, wherein the bi-directional services database resides at the  
2 home communications terminal.

1        27.     The system of claim 25, wherein the bi-directional services database is external to the  
2 home communications terminal.

1        28.     The system of claim 25, wherein the bi-directional services database includes an  
2 availability table of entries, each entry respectively associated with a bi-directional service and each  
3 entry indicating whether the associated bi-directional service is available.

1        29.     The system of claim 25, wherein the bi-directional services program guide application  
2 server is configured to query the bi-directional services database to determine the availability of a bi-  
3 directional service requested by a subscriber.

1        30.     The system of claim 25, wherein the bi-directional services program guide application  
2 server is configured to update the bi-directional services database when a bi-directional service is  
3 rendered to the subscriber.

1        31.     The system of claim 30, wherein the bi-directional services program guide application  
2 server is configured to transmit the updated bi-directional services database to the home  
3 communications terminal.